DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 339 CS 217 297

AUTHOR	Brynildssen, Shawna
TITLE	Vocabulary's Influence on Successful Writing. ERIC Digest D157.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CS-00-08
PUB DATE	2000-11-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0028
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Indiana University, 2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 140, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698. Tel: 800-759-4723 (Toll Free); Web site: http://eric.indiana.edu.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Class Activities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Vocabulary Development; *Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Arguing that the ability to write effectively hinges upon having an adequate vocabulary, this digest explores some of the ways vocabulary influences writing ability, and how teachers can use vocabulary development specifically to improve writing skills. The digest suggests that the breadth and depth of a student's vocabulary will have a direct influence upon the descriptiveness, accuracy, and quality of his or her writing. It outlines several key principles that should guide teachers in the creation of and implementation of a comprehensive vocabulary development program. The digest argues that improvement in vocabulary will result in improved writing skills only if the teacher is able to create a classroom that takes writing seriously. It also describes techniques teachers can use to create a writing-centered classroom. (SR)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 446 339

Vocabulary's Influence on Successful Writing. ERIC Digest.

by Shawna Brynildssen

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS 217 297

ERIC Digest

Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication EDO-CS-00-08
Indiana University
2805 E. 10th St., Suite 140 D157
Bloomington, IN 47408-2698
(812) 855-5847; (800) 759-4723

Vocabulary's Influence on Successful Writing

by Shawna Brynildssen

There is extensive research indicating that a rich vocabulary is a critical element of reading ability. Laflamme (1997) states that recent research has identified vocabulary knowledge as the *single most important* factor in reading comprehension. There is, likewise, no shortage of studies documenting a strong link between reading and writing. "Reading and writing are two analogous and complementary processes in that both involve generating ideas, organizing ideas into a logical order, drafting them a number of times to achieve cohesion, and revising the ideas as is appropriate" (Laflamme, 1997, p. 373). The processes are so closely aligned that some researchers even advocate teaching reading and writing simultaneously, rather than as two separate subjects (Laflamme, 1997).

If the writing process is inextricably linked to the reading process, and the reading process is heavily dependent upon vocabulary, it naturally follows that the writing process is likewise dependent. This digest will explore some of the ways vocabulary influences writing ability, and how teachers can use vocabulary development specifically to improve writing skills.

Vocabulary and Writing: Finding the Right Words

In some ways, the ability to write effectively hinges upon having an adequate vocabulary even more than does the ability to read. Once students have learned to decode words, they may be able to read and pronounce many words that are unfamiliar to them. They may even be able to determine accurate meanings of unfamiliar words simply by examining the context in which those words are used. During the writing process, however, a student does not have the luxury of examining the context in which a word is used; he or she is *creating* the context. Therefore, the writer must be able to spontaneously recall words that are known not only by sight, but that are understood well enough to use correctly. "Mayher and Brause (1986) have stated that writing is dependent upon the ability to draw upon words to describe an event" (Corona, Spangenberger, & Venet, 1989, p. 18).

Shawna Brynildssen is a freelance writer and editor located in Bloomington, Indiana. She received a BA in English from Hanover College, Hanover, Indiana in 1988.

The breadth and depth of a student's vocabulary will have a direct influence upon the descriptiveness, accuracy, and quality of his or her writing. As Ediger (1999) notes, "variety in selecting words to convey accurate meanings is necessary in speaking and writing, the outgoes of the language arts" (p. 1). Corona, Spangenberger, and Venet (1998) concur: "At any level, written communication is more effective when a depth of vocabulary and command of language is evident" (p.26).

Principles of Vocabulary Development

Because words are the writer's most important tools, vocabulary development must be an important and ongoing part of classroom learning. Laflamme (1997) offers several key principles that should guide the creation and implementation of a comprehensive vocabulary development program.

1. Teachers must offer direct instruction of techniques or procedures for developing a broad and varied vocabulary. This instruction can be provided both formally through the language arts program, and informally through various classroom interactions—such as story time—with students.

2. New vocabulary terms must be connected to students' previous knowledge and experiences. If students are unable to contextualize new words by attaching them to words and concepts they already understand, the words will likely have little meaning to them. And as Ediger (1999) points out, "if meaning is lacking, the chances are pupils will memorize terms and concepts for testing purposes only or largely" (p. 2).

3. Students should be able to contextualize the vocabulary terms they have learned and use them in society (Ediger, 1999, p. 7). In order for students to do this successfully, they must first learn to become comfortable using these words in the classroom. Students should be required or encouraged to incorporate new vocabulary terms into their oral and written reports and presentations.

4. Practice and repetition are important methods by which students can become familiar with new words and understand how they may be used correctly (Laflamme, 1997). Students should be frequently exposed to the same words through practice exercises, classroom use, and testing.

5. Teachers should model an enthusiasm for and curiosity about new words through their own behaviors and attitudes. Teachers who are enthusiastic about vocabulary development will automatically look for "teachable moments" throughout the day, pointing out interesting words as they crop up in texts, stories, or conversation; asking students to explore alternative ways of expressing concepts; and helping identify colorful, descriptive ways of speaking and writing.

6. Schools, teachers, and students must be committed to vocabulary development over the long term. The teaching of vocabulary must be an interdisciplinary project, integrated into the curriculum at every level.

Using Vocabulary to Improve Writing Skills

While improved vocabulary can enhance students' writing skills, there is no guarantee that it will do so automatically. Improvement in vocabulary will result in improved writing skills only if the teacher is able to create a classroom that takes writing seriously. "In such a classroom, process and environment are closely intertwined and interdependent. The process does not come alive unless the environment is conducive to it" (Corona, Spangenberger, & Venet, 1998, p. 24). The following are techniques teachers can use to create a writing-centered classroom.

1. *Sharing vocabulary-rich literature.* Sloan (1996) explains that in her quest to help her students become better writers, she "went to the best source for teaching good writing: good books" (p. 268). By having students read (or reading aloud to them) books, poems, and stories that contain interesting vocabulary, teachers can both introduce new words and provide a forum for discussing them.

2. *Helping students become aware of and look for interesting words.* There are many different forms this can take. For example, students could pair up and look through books for words that catch their attention, then write down common words that the author could have used instead. Other methods include having students: write words they encounter on an "Interesting Word Wall" (Sloan, 1996. P. 268); create a word bank through words-of-the day that are taken from classroom literature (Corona, Spangenberger, & Venet, 1998, p. 25); record or act out energetic verbs; or write unfamiliar words in "literature-response journals" for later exploration (Manning, 1999, p. 3).

3. *Offering a variety of writing opportunities.* "A writer-centered classroom emphasizes using written expression to communicate ideas. Writing is an important part of all areas of the curriculum" (Corona, Spangenberger, & Venet, 1998, p. 29). The authors go on to note that students have a greater investment in their writing when they are given choices about their assignments. Such choices may include journal or diary entries, weekly logs summarizing journal entries, book reports, outlines, poetry, autobiographies, short stories, or any number of variations on the above.

4. *Providing ample time for students to fully experience the writing process* (Corona, Spangenberger, & Venet, 1998). The teaching of writing should be approached as a process that must be studied in depth, and substantial blocks of time should be devoted to writing.

5. *Allowing students to conference with teachers and fellow students* (Corona, Spangenberger, & Venet, 1998). When writing topics are chosen, students should meet with their teacher to discuss ideas and answer questions. The teacher's role is to encourage, build on existing strengths, and help the student expand his or her abilities. Conferencing with fellow students gives the budding writer the opportunity to share ideas, brainstorm, and rework his or her project.

References

Corona, Cathy, Spangenberger, Sandra, & Venet, Iris (1998). Improving Student Writing through a Language Rich Environment. M.A. Action Research Project, St. Xavier University and IRI/Skylight, 61 pages.

Ediger, Marlow. (1999). "Reading and Vocabulary Development." *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 26*(1), 7–15.

Laflamme, John G. (1997). "The Effect of Multiple Exposure Vocabulary Method and the Target Reading/Writing Strategy on Test Scores." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 40*(5), 372–384.

Manning, Maryann. (1999). "Helping Words Grow." *Teaching PreK–8, 29*(4), 103–105.

Mayher, J.S., & Brause, R.S. (1986). "Learning through Teaching: Is Testing Crippling Integrated Language Education?" *Language Arts, 63*(4), 390–96.

Sloane, Megan. (1996). "Encouraging Young Students to Use Interesting Words in Their Writing." *The Reading Teacher, 50*(3), 268–69.

Digest #157 is EDO-CS-00-06 and was published in November 2000 by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication, 2805 E 10th Street, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698, Telephone (812) 855-5847 or (800) 759-4723. ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced. Additional copies may be ordered by contacting the ERIC Document Reproduction Service at (800) 443-3742.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-99-CO-0028. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.